

## CHAPTER 5

### First New Zealand Pacific Victory

*In the first few days of May 1943, RNZAF Hudson crews flying Area G sector patrols from Guadalcanal towards Bougainville had often spotted a Japanese floatplane flying a reciprocal route. These were in fact, not one fighter, but No. 938 Ku F1M2 Petes conducting patrols to Rekata Bay. Nonetheless, the New Zealanders decided to attack the next one they could find, using a Hudson bomber as pathfinder, and a pair of Kittyhawks to do the job.*

**H**udsons usually flew the maritime sector patrols from Guadalcanal unescorted, however for this specialised mission of 6 May, a RNZAF No. 3 Squadron Hudson flown by Flying Officer John Buchanan set off escorted by two No. 15 Squadron Kittyhawk IIIs. Aboard Buchanan's Hudson was Squadron Leader Doug Grigg as extra observer, with the regular crew of co-pilot Pilot Officer Charles Parker, Pilot Officer John Pettigrew, Sergeant Leo O'Sullivan and Sergeant Brian Vesty.

No. 15 Squadron, RNZAF, had just arrived at Guadalcanal on 26 April 1943, under the leadership of Battle of Britain veteran Squadron Leader Michael Herrick. On this mission of 6 May, Herrick himself flew accompanied by wingman Flight Lieutenant Stanley Duncan. The Hudson led them to where they suspected the floatplane might be, but erroneously identified it as a Nakajima E8N1 Dave. It was distant – an estimated three miles away – and initially Herrick and Duncan could not see it, so Buchanan directed them towards the quarry.

The floatplane was one of seven F1M2 Petes assigned to No. 938 *Ku* which was tasked with making a series of overlapping "armed reconnaissance" patrols from their Shortlands island base, towards their advance base at Rekata Bay. The late afternoon patrol was being flown by FPO2c Kaname Yoshimitsu with observer/gunner FPO2c Watanabe Yorozu. Just before the Kittyhawks approached, Watanabe broadcast that they were about 165 miles from base, en route to Rekata in marginal weather.



Thick rain cloud temporarily obscured the Pete from view as the two Kittyhawks stalked it, but they found it again skirting between cloud banks.

*The pair of Kittyhawks flown by Herrick and Duncan, viewed from Buchanan's Hudson heading out on the "find and destroy" mission on 6 May 1943.*